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CIA 101 Colby, Wm.
ORG 1 NAVY League

Lawbreaking by the CIA should amuse no one

In a speech to the Navy League the other day, William E. Colby, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, denounced the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence for pursuing its investigation of the CIA's mail-snooping operations.

"We are about to have our fifth re-run of the great mail-reading story," Mr. Colby said sarcastically. Then, rhetorically: "Is intelligence to become a mere theater for the amusement or amazement of the people rather than being preserved and protected for the benefit of all?"

Rhetorical questions are supposed to supply their own answers, but Mr. Colby's doesn't, just as the CIA itself has not been supplying adequate answers to questions about its behavior over the years.

We think Mr. Colby ought to get off his high horse. Obviously, intelligence should be "preserved and protected," but that's not all that should be preserved and protected in this Republic of ours.

The Senate committee headed by Sen. Frank Church of Idaho is engaged in serious business — the business of ascertaining how it happened that for 20 years, starting in the first year of the Eisenhower Administration and apparently ending only with Watergate, the CIA was systematically violating the constitutional rights of American citizens and the law of the land.

And knowing that it was doing wrong. According to testimony and

documents introduced after Mr. Colby spoke his piece, the mail-snooping operations were much more extensive than either the Rockefeller Commission report or previous congressional investigations have indicated.

In its New York operation alone, the CIA opened more than 215,000 pieces of mail, and several CIA officials, including Mr. Colby's predecessor, Richard A. Helms, admitted to the committee that they knew that the mail-opening was illegal. It may also be noted that twice, in 1960 and 1969, CIA internal investigations found that little if any intelligence value was being derived from the project. But that didn't keep the CIA from going on with it.

Now we do not find any "amusement" in all this. Nor, we're sorry to say, do we find any "amazement" in it, either, after all that's come out about so much other lawlessness perpetrated in the guise of "national security" — assassination plots by the CIA, burglaries and domestic espionage on dissenters by the FBI, intrusions into private communications by the CIA, the FBI and the National Security Agency, not to mention the routine lying to Congress.

If Congress is to be criticized, it is for trying to know as little as possible about these activities in the past. For the future, though, it is up to Congress to see that they don't happen again, and we suggest that instead of kicking Congress Mr. Colby would do better to cooperate with it toward that end.